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## Letter from D. W. Lee to Anna Clemson, 1862 February 9

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New York  
Feb. 9<sup>th</sup> 1862

My dear Mrs. Clemens

A  
C626.

I have your long and pleasant letter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and at last I have the "cartes de visite" and "vignettes" which I send you by Express today - to Mr B L Jackson as you direct - and I sincerely hope they will make a successful journey. I avail myself of your kind permission to retain one, and beg you will let me know what I am to send the daguerrotype, as I did not distinctly understand, whether it was to be returned to Mr Brown or sent to you. I am gratified to hear your news from our friends and glad that Columbus progresses at school and has got up in his class - nothing gives a manly character sooner



than to be made dependant on  
yourself, and have to fight your  
way amongst equals.

Did you ever sit down with a  
strong desire to write, and a feeling  
that you could converse with your  
correspondent all night, and find  
nothing flow from your pen. That  
is my condition - it is Sunday  
night - I am alone in my room  
with a bright fire - do not feel  
dull, and find nothing to write.  
Were you sitting in the arm chair  
opposite I could talk on any or  
all subjects until morning - even  
Swedenborg and cognate subjects  
would not be impracticable, but  
there is something about the  
slowness of this mechanical mode  
of expressing thought or feeling  
that at times seems to kill both.  
Were I writing a lecture - an essay  
or a novel, there would be no  
difficulty, but letter writing



is a good subject for discussion  
and a miserable skeleton for  
dialogue. Could you ever divine  
how M<sup>re</sup> de Kérac could write  
so many, and such amusing letters  
- they have all the grace and  
"vivacité" of conversation, and seem  
perfectly unstudied, and yet  
they must be elaborate com-  
- positions, from the simple fact  
that they are always elegant,  
in style, and never dull, and are  
about the only volumes of letters that  
I could ever read through with  
pleasure; Chesterfield's it is true  
are clever, and show great knowledge  
of the world (at least the worst  
side of it) but that old white-  
sepulchre is so perfectly selfish,  
and so entirely without manliness  
of thought & feeling, that one  
becomes impatient of the book, and  
is not at all surprised that his



Pupils grew up, with his Father's  
minds, and without his brains.  
And as I speak of pupils, I remember  
that mine must feel the want of  
instruction, and especially of refresh-  
- so please say to her, that she should  
write, as well as read - we never know  
that we have any thoughts, until  
we try to write them down, and never  
know whether they are correct or not,  
until we submit them to the slower  
test, which gives time, to sit in  
judgment on them. Please add, that  
it is my special request, that she  
write Poems - tales - essays etc and  
then - a novel - if she finds she can  
invent characters and incidents -  
on this head I am strongly tempted  
to quote Lord Bacon (wholly the way  
was not Lord Bacon, but Lord Verulam,  
and why the whole world should call  
him Lord Bacon, has always been a  
mystery to me) who has some  
excellent remarks, on the necessity  
of writing our thoughts, if we ever



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1862

wish to give them precision or  
correctness. And now, from his  
Lordship to streets, is a great descent,  
but your roads can only be a little  
worse than our streets have been  
for the last fortnight. Broadway  
is ankle deep in slush and snow,  
and the pavements are covered  
with ice, making walking posi-  
tively dangerous. My Mother  
does not dare to walk, and  
indeed every body has ventured  
to do so with fear and trembling,  
but now we have a prospect of  
better things. Today has been  
Springlike with a bright blue  
sky, and sunshine enough to  
warm every paving stone in  
the city. My two eldest nieces  
are at Dr. Creightons on a short  
visit, and Ma. Geo. Maggie and  
I are keeping house. Ben will  
precise from a paper I sent  
you thence (if you ever got it)  
that it was an O.K. ten days



since, and could I possibly have  
spared the time, should have  
run down to Washington for a  
day, but it was out of my power.  
Phila changes very little in  
its aspect, and I suspect Florida  
could walk down Chestnut St  
without perceiving any alterations  
of note, since her promenades  
there in her school days, which,  
after all that philosophers and  
poets have written about them,  
are not our happiest days.

Why, the mere fact of our doing  
everything according to the  
will and pleasure of somebody  
else, is enough to make things  
intolerable, to say nothing  
of occasional subsistence, and  
frequent starvation. I wish  
some of the philosophers or poets  
aforesaid would go back to  
school for a month, and I  
think their views would



materially change.

And now, as I must close, I  
will merely say, that whilst  
scribbling nonsense, you have  
my sincere sympathy in your  
editorial position. But I do not  
think you will misunderstand  
my letters; I hold, that it is  
not wise, to turn our eyes always  
upon the disagreeable, indeed  
it is never so, except when we  
can make some effort for relief,  
so I write what comes uppermost  
with the wish that it may  
amuse you, and instruct my  
pupil for perhaps a few minutes.  
Still unite in kind regards to  
both. Brown, I understand, is in  
W.; should you see him, please  
present me kindly to him, and  
believe me to be, sincerely  
Your friend and servant  
J. W. Lee

P.S. Your draft came duly and was  
duly honored. L